MIDDLE BALD MOUNTAIN AREA
COMMUNICATION SITE
Record of Decision

Killpecker site from Middle Bald Mountain

December 2014
USDA FOREST SERVICE
ROOSEVELT NATIONAL FOREST
LARIMER COUNTY, COLORADO

MIDDLE BALD MOUNTAIN AREA COMMUNICATION SITE
Record of Decision

Lead Agency: USDA Forest Service

Responsible Official: Glenn P. Casamassa, Forest Supervisor
Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland

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Abstract
An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared for the proposed Middle Bald Mountain Area Communication Site in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 USC §4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and the US Forest Service (Forest Service) NEPA implementing regulations (36 CFR Part 220).

The purpose of and need for this action is to provide expanded and more-reliable, all-weather emergency communications capabilities in north central Larimer County, including additional reaches of the Poudre Canyon. VHF radio coverage is presently poor or nonexistent in the mountainous north central part of the County, including the Poudre Canyon (Colorado Highway 14), Red Feather Lakes, Crystal Lakes subdivision, Glacier View Meadows subdivision, and the remote mountainous areas of the Roosevelt National Forest. The need for this action is to improve public safety communication capability, add capacity for an 800 MHz frequency, and reliability so fire and medical first-responders, law enforcement, other government public safety and public service agencies (i.e., volunteer fire departments, Larimer County Search and Rescue, the Forest Service, and other government entities) can provide quicker and better assistance to area residents and recreational visitors during both emergency and routine incidents in those areas.

The Forest Service has decided to issue an authorization to Larimer County to construct, operate, and maintain a government entities only (Federal, state, county and municipal entities) radio communications facility at the Killpecker Site for both VHF and 800 MHz communications. The Killpecker Site was identified as Environmentally Preferred and Forest Service Preferred Alternative in the both the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. This decision includes the authorization to construct and occupy National Forest System lands as follows:

- an approximately 70-foot high, 3-legged steel lattice tower;
- an approximately 200 square-foot equipment building near the tower, including a 20 kilowatt diesel generator separate from the building as backup if electric power is interrupted;
- an approximately 10-foot wide access road during construction from NFSR 300 to the communications facility;
- approximately 11.6 miles of power line; and
- provide an authorization to Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association for construction, operation, and maintenance of a 7.2kV power line to serve the communication site.

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1. Project Background

Use within the Poudre River Canyon has increased significantly over the past several years requiring increasing emergency responses both in the Canyon and on the river. In addition, increasing numbers of private homes are being built within the Canyon and in the rugged foothills to the north. As a result of this increasing use and development, emergency responders such as law enforcement, wildland and volunteer firefighters, and search and rescue organizations find the use of the existing Deadman Communication Site does not provide adequate emergency and public service radio communication coverage and/or signal strength in north central Colorado, particularly in the Poudre Canyon and remote mountainous areas of north central Larimer County.

Larimer County and the Forest Service currently have VHF (very high frequency) public service and emergency radio communications equipment at the Deadman Communications Site, located on the Roosevelt National Forest north and west of the Red Feather Lakes area in Section 13, Township 10 North, Range 75 West in Larimer County. Co-located with the County's equipment are State of Colorado and City of Fort Collins radio communication facilities. Area volunteer fire departments and search and rescue organizations do not have radio equipment at the Deadman site, but they utilize the County's radio equipment and frequencies when responding to emergencies in north-central and north-western Colorado. There is no commercial power at the Deadman site; all radio and cellular communication facilities there are currently powered by very small solar arrays.

Adding to this situation, the State and County have made the decision to convert to the nationwide 800 MHz emergency radio communication system. A functional statewide 800 MHz network requires an 800 MHz radio communication facility somewhere in the north-central Colorado area. While the Deadman Communication Site could fill that gap, an 800 MHz system is active at all times, unlike VHF, which is only activated when a microphone is keyed. The lack of commercial electrical power at the Deadman site would be problematic, as large solar and/or wind and/or generator power facilities would otherwise be essential to power 800 MHz facilities there. However, even if commercial power were available, the Deadman site would not provide adequate coverage or signal strength for an 800 MHz system in north central Colorado or in the Poudre Canyon.

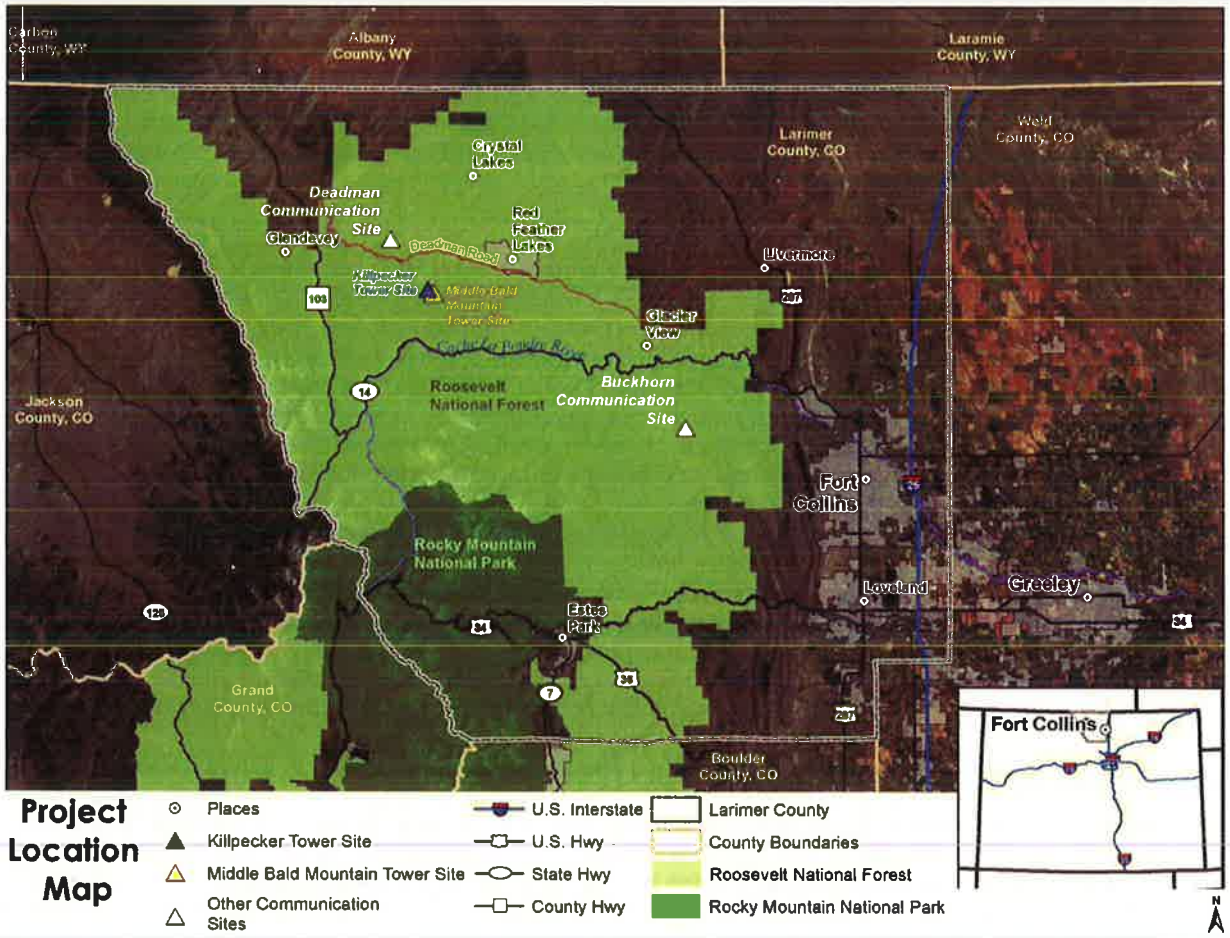
To address these signal coverage and signal strength issues, Larimer County conducted a series of technical studies, beginning in March 2001. Pacific Consulting Services identified Poudre Canyon and Laramie River Valley as areas requiring additional public safety radio coverage. Larimer County submitted a proposal for the construction of a communication facility on South Bald Mountain to the Forest Service in March 2003. The Forest Service denied this application after determining that the proposed site on South Bald Mountain was not consistent with applicable laws and policies.

After the South Bald Mountain Communication Site proposal was screened and then denied by the Forest Service, Larimer County constructed a communication site on Bull Mountain, which, together with facilities on Pole Mountain in southern Wyoming, improved coverage in the Laramie River Valley. The County then conducted additional technical studies and evaluated multiple sites throughout Larimer County for improving radio communications in northern portions of the County and in Poudre Canyon. These studies resulted in a proposal by Larimer County to construct a communication facility on Middle Bald Mountain, which was submitted to the Forest Service in April 2006. This proposal met the applicable screening criteria and the Forest Service accepted the County's application proposal. The Forest Service initiated an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Middle Bald Mountain site in September 2006, and solicited public input on the proposal during the EA scoping period, which began December 1, 2006 and ended January 22, 2007. In 2008, Larimer County asked that the Forest Service suspend processing of their application for budgetary reasons. Between 2009 and 2011, Larimer County conducted additional technical studies to further refine their proposed plans for the site. A revised proposal for the Middle Bald Mountain communication site was submitted to the Forest Service in April 2011 and was accepted in November 2011.

As a result of issues raised during scoping, the Forest Service determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would be the appropriate NEPA document to analyze and disclose the effects of the

County's 2011 proposal. The EIS process was initiated with publication of a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on September 14, 2012. That Notice of Intent opened the EIS scoping period, which closed on October 29, 2012. Public comments expressed concerns about the extent of impacts to both physical resources and the importance of intangible qualities such as the sense of place, wildness, isolation, etc. In response to those comments, the Forest and County continued to search for alternative site locations that would meet the project purpose and need and have fewer resource impacts than the Middle Bald Mountain site. One such location, referenced herein as the Killpecker Site, was identified. **Figure 1** shows the project location. The Draft EIS (DEIS) was released in June 2014.

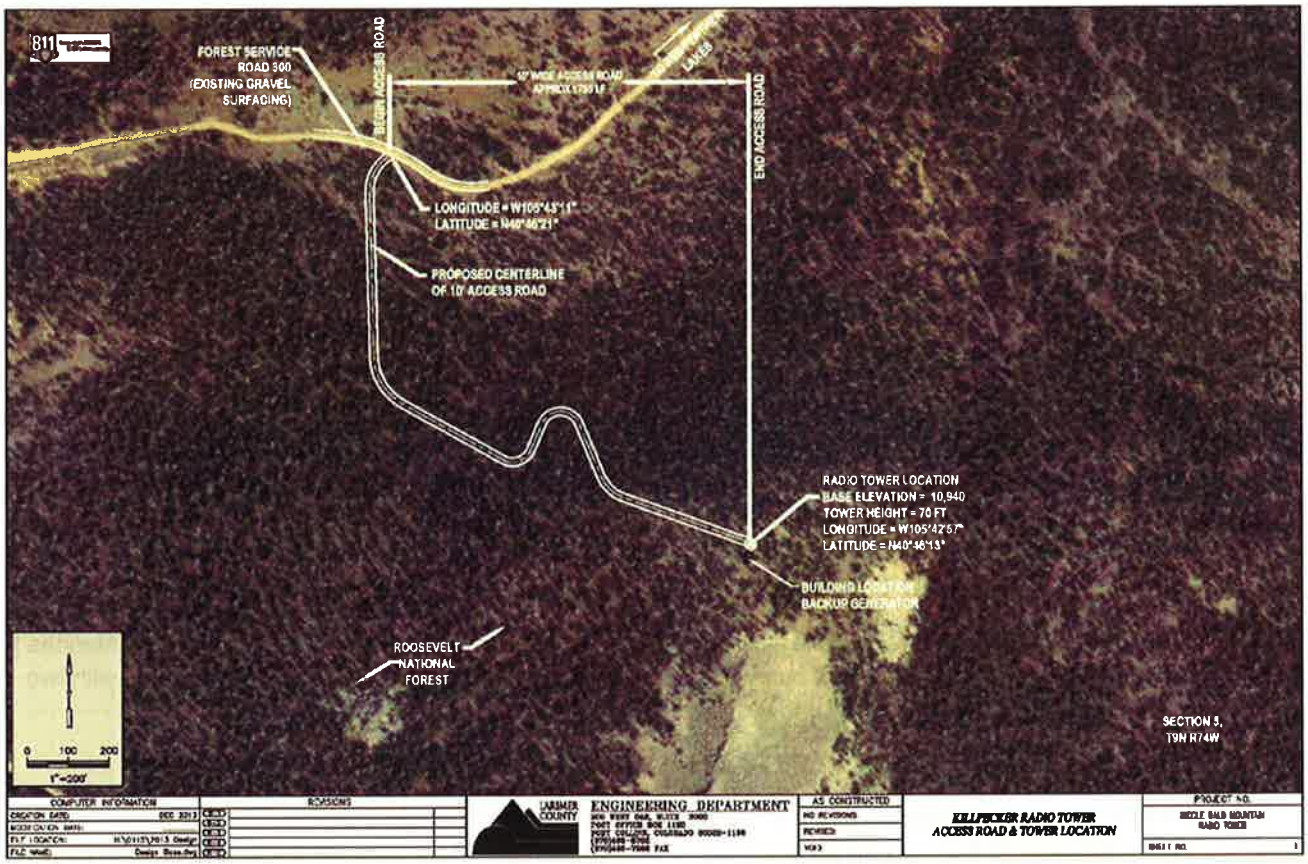
Figure 1



2. Decision

My decision is to issue an authorization to Larimer County for the construction, operation, and maintenance of a government entities only VHF and 800MHz communication facility at the Killpecker Site, which is identified in the DEIS and FEIS as the Environmentally Preferred and Forest Service Preferred Alternative **(see Figures 2 and 4)**.

Figure 2



My decision includes the following components:

Site Location

The range of reasonable alternatives was developed in response to issues raised during the two scoping processes. Under the selected alternative, the Forest Service would issue an authorization to Larimer County for the construction, operation, and maintenance of a government entities only communication site at the Killpecker site, located approximately one-half (0.5) miles northwest of Middle Bald Mountain at an elevation of approximately 11,014 feet. The tower and building will house equipment for use by Larimer County, the State of Colorado, the Fort Collins Water Department, volunteer fire departments, search and rescue organizations, and the Forest Service. Larimer County will be the lease holder and site manager. . The Forest Service will co-locate at the Killpecker site, as well. The Killpecker communication site would meet the purpose of and need for action by improving VHF and adding 800 MHz coverage and reliability in north central Larimer County and the Poudre Canyon for fire and medical first-responders, law enforcement, and other local, State, and Federal emergency and public services users. The Environmentally Preferred Alternative to authorize a communication facility at the Killpecker site is the Forest Service's preferred alternative. **Figure 2** shows the overall site plan for the Killpecker site. In addition, the Forest Service will issue an authorization to PVREA for the construction, operation, and maintenance of an overhead distribution power line to serve the communication site. The new power line will connect from PVREA's existing infrastructure near Red Feather Lake, extend west alongside the Deadman Road (County Road 162) to its junction with the Killpecker Road, then south alongside the Killpecker Road (NFSR 300) to its

junction with the new site access road. The overhead power line will continue alongside the access road to the communication site building at the Killpecker site.

The Killpecker communication site is located in MA 5.11 (Emphasis on General Forest and Intermingled Rangeland). If the Decision is to authorize a designated communication site, the Forest Plan map would be amended to designate the approximately 0.5 acres within the designated communication site boundary as MA 8.3 (Emphasis on Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites).

Tower Location and Design

The proposed tower at the Killpecker site would be a self-supporting, three-legged, steel lattice tower approximately 70 feet in height. At the base, the distance between each of the three legs will be six feet. The tower will be located approximately 20 feet from the equipment building on a 20-foot by 20-foot concrete pad. There will be no guy wires.

The tower will include a ladder with an anti-climb guard to prevent unauthorized access. A galvanized finish with a low reflectivity (after weathering) will be used on the tower. The tower will require no lights; per FAA regulations only towers 200 feet or more in height must be lighted (47 U.S.C. §17.21). The concrete footings for each of the three tower legs will be buried to a depth that cannot be determined without a detailed soil and engineering analysis. If the site is authorized this analysis would be conducted prior to construction. Depending on the depth required, substantial soil and rock disturbance could be necessary.

Equipment on the tower will include: a six-foot diameter microwave dish; two 11 foot fiberglass antennae for the 800 MHz radios; one five foot omni-directional fiberglass antenna; four 10 foot dipole masts, with two VHF dipole antennae each; and a tower-top signal amplifier.

Building Location and Design

A rectangular, approximately 192 square-foot (12-foot by 16-foot) single-story modular equipment building approximately 10 feet high will be constructed on a 16-foot by 20-foot concrete building pad, up to 20 feet away from the tower. The building will be a transportable shelter designed to be skid-mounted on a concrete slab or pier foundation. It will be designed and camouflaged to blend in with the terrain to the greatest extent possible. An example of building camouflage that could be used to blend the building in with its surroundings is provided below. A separate 10x6-foot concrete slab about eight feet from the building will be needed to support the backup generator. All camouflage and concrete slab profile, texture, and color will be approved by the Forest Service prior to construction.

Examples of Building Location and Design

Example of a building and tower similar to proposed facilities

Example of camouflage techniques – texture and color – that could be used to blend the building in with its surroundings.

Site Access

A permanent approximately 10-foot wide access road surfaced with native material will extend about 1,800 feet from NFSR 300 to the communication facility at the Killpecker site. The Killpecker site will have road access all the way to the communication site building and tower **(Figure 2)** and access for monthly operations and maintenance visits will be unconstrained as long as the road remains snow-free. When snow prevents access by a high-clearance vehicle, access would be by over-the-snow vehicles or on foot. The access road will be added to the system as an administrative road and will be gated where it leaves NFSR 300.

Power Source and Power Line Route

Power for the communication facility's radio equipment, interior lights, receptacles, heating, and cooling systems will be provided by an 11.6 mile extension of the commercial electrical power grid from Red Feather Lakes. In a connection action, the Forest Service will authorize PVREA to construct, maintain, and operate a 7.2 kV power line which will be installed overhead along County Road 162 (Deadman Road), NFSR 300, and alongside the access road to the communication facility.

The power line will be installed on 29-foot tall wooden monopoles for most of its length. The span between the overhead poles will range from 240 to 280 feet; approximately 235 poles will be installed along the proposed alignment for the power line.

The power and communication feed lines between the tower and the equipment building will run in a galvanized steel cable tray 12 inches wide and three inches tall. The cable tray will be mounted overhead between the building and tower. The tray to the tower will be armored to protect against vandalism and camouflaged to blend with the surroundings.

The proposed facility will also include a backup generator for use in the event of interruption of commercial power. The generator will be a 20 kW diesel generator with a 204-gallon, double–walled, EPA-approved belly diesel fuel tank. The generator and diesel tank will be placed on a 10-foot by 6-foot reinforced concrete pad outside the building. The generator will be armored to protect against vandalism and camouflaged to blend with the surroundings. All camouflage and concrete slab profile, texture, and color will be approved by the Forest Service prior to construction.

Radio Coverage

A drive test survey in 2013 was conducted in order to measure the performance of the Killpecker site and compare it to the performance of the Middle Bald Mountain site (Pericle 2013). The report concluded that the Killpecker site would produce, on average, signals 7.5 dB stronger than the Middle Bald Mountain site in the Poudre Canyon.

My decision also includes the following Design Criteria and Construction Best Management Practices:

Design Criteria

- The profile, texture, and color of all development structures will be approved by the Forest Service in the Communication Site Plan.
- Design and construction of the power line will follow the Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee 2006).
- Pole placement for power line installation will avoid Site 5LR11364.3 (Old Deadman Road) and historic water control features along Deadman Road (Site 5LR11364).
- The power line will be constructed so that, anywhere the power line crosses over a road, there will be a minimum of 18-vertical clearance between the road surface and the power line.
- Larimer County and PVREA will submit design and construction plans prior to construction; the plans will be approved by the Forest Service prior to construction.

- Vegetation clearance under the power line will be limited to that which is tall enough to interfere with the power line, to a distance of 10 feet on either side of the centerline of the ROW. Hazard trees will be removed up to 50' on either side of the power line in an appropriate manner.
- Disturbance for construction of the access road will be limited to an approximately 18-foot wide corridor through old growth cover types. This will allow for an approximately 10-foot wide travelway and a 4-foot wide clearing limit on either side of the access road.
- No surface disturbance will occur within 100 feet of the known population of the rare plant *Pyrola picta* identified along NFSR 300. Wetland and waterbody surveys will be conducted prior to construction in areas to be disturbed for the power line along NFSR 300.
- All wetlands and waterbodies will be strictly avoided. No surface disturbance (including overland vehicle travel) will occur within 100 feet of wetland or riparian areas without prior Forest Service approval. All vegetation thinning within riparian or wetland areas will be completed either by hand or from the road. If wetlands and waterbodies cannot be avoided, consultation with the Forest Service to determine additional mitigation will be required, and features identified as jurisdictional during surveys will require consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- The access road will be designed as a Level 2 road with a minimum traveled width of 10 feet. Level 2 roads are not crowned but may be ditched depending on the surrounding topography. Grades below 8% are maintained wherever possible; however 8% to12% grades may be maintained for less than 200 feet. Local materials are used; these materials are generated from within road profile itself and it is rarely necessary to obtain additional material from other locations. Branches and vegetation are cleared 4 feet on each side of the traveled way.
- Soil preparation, soil conditioning or topsoil, seeding, mulching, and mulch tackifier will be required to restore areas temporarily disturbed by construction. Disturbed surfaces will be left in a roughened condition by equipment tracking, scarifying or disking the surface on contour with a two- to four- inch minimum variation in soil surface, depending on the amount of equipment traffic and compaction. A mix of native seed will be drilled into disturbed areas except in small areas not accessible to a drill; in those areas, seed will be hand broadcast at double the application rate, and raked into the soil. Hydromulch will be applied to all seeded areas immediately following the application and raking of seed. An organic soil conditioner (i.e., compost, topsoil, peat, mulch or similar) will also be applied to all seeded areas, per Forest Service specification.
- Restoration activities will conform to the Forest Service revegetation policy and must be approved in advance.
- A Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan will be included in the Site Management Plan that is attached to and made a part of the special use authorization.
- Preconstruction amphibian surveys may be conducted by Forest Service personnel, Forest Service contractors, or Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) personnel if suitable habitat or known populations will be disturbed.
- Preconstruction raptor nest surveys may be conducted by Forest Service personnel or Forest Service contractors. Additional consultation with the USFS and CPW (formerly CDOW) regarding survey protocols and protection buffers will occur prior to the surveys.

Construction Best Management Practices

Construction best management practices to be implemented during project construction are described below.

Materials Handling and Spill Prevention

- Bulk storage structures for petroleum products and any other chemicals will have secondary containment or equivalent protection so as to contain all spills and prevent any spilled material from entering State waters.

- The construction contractor will inspect and certify equipment and vehicles daily to ensure petroleum, oils, and lubricants are not leaking onto the soil or pavement. Absorbent material or containers will be used to prevent leaking petroleum, oils, and lubricants from reaching the soil or pavement. The contractor shall have absorbent material or containers of sufficient capacity to contain any leak that can reasonably be foreseen.
- Surplus construction materials and waste debris will be removed from the site no later than 30 days after construction has been completed.

Stockpile Management

- Any material stockpiles will be located away from sensitive areas and confined so that no material or their run-off will enter State waters.
- Silt fence, berms or other sediment control devices will be placed at the toe (or just beyond toe) of all erodible stockpiles (including topsoil).
- There will not be stockpiling or side casting of waste materials adjacent to any State waters.

Vehicle Tracking

- Vehicle and equipment inspection for noxious and undesirable weeds will occur prior to site entry and each re-entry. Inspectors, inspection rejection thresholds, and washing stations will be determined by the Forest Service prior to project implementation.
- The construction contractor will certify that construction equipment has been cleared prior to site arrival, and again prior to leaving the staging area on NFSR 517 or NFSR 300, where weeds are known to be present. Vehicles shall be free of soil and debris capable of transporting noxious weed seeds or roots onto the construction site.

Storm Water Management

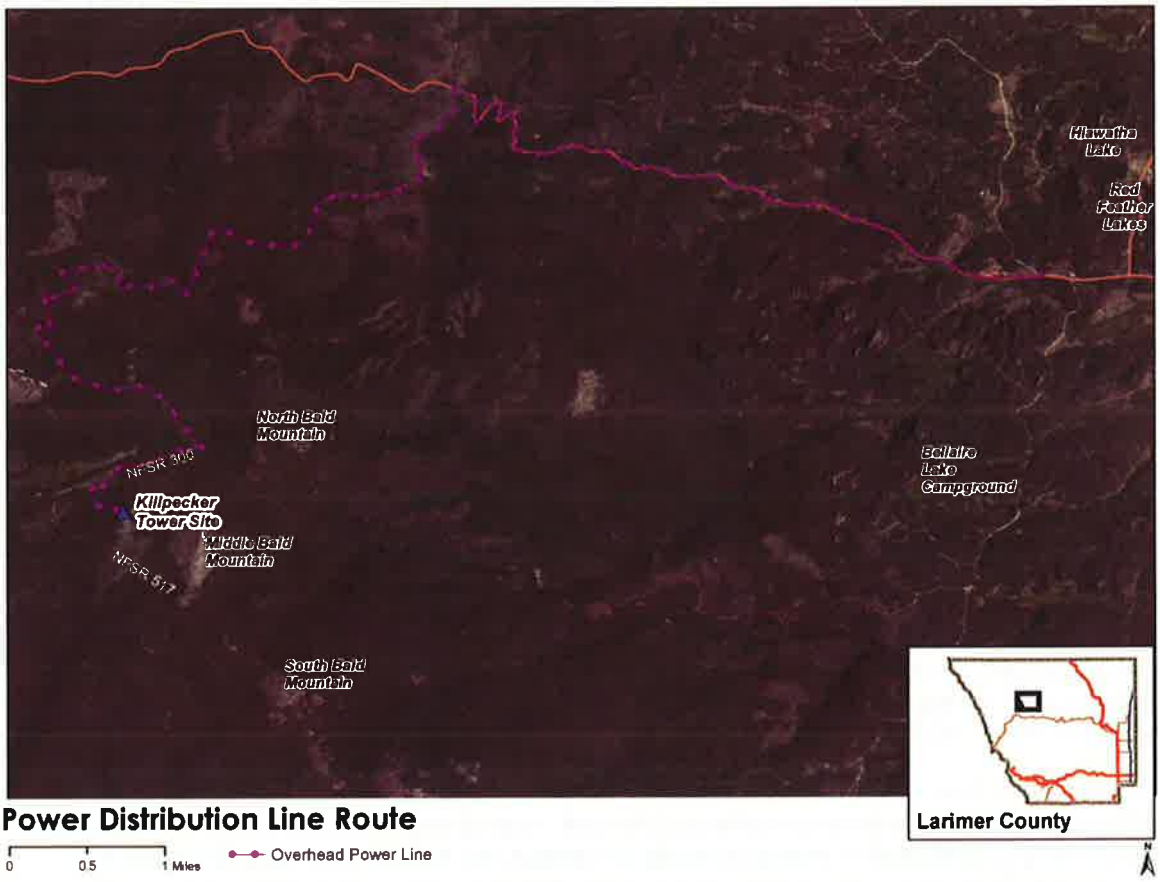
- A site-specific erosion control plan will be provided to the Forest Service for approval by the Forest Service prior to commencement of construction.
- Surface runoff from above the access road will be captured and directed along the roadside to outlet pipes. All outlet pipes will be protected with erosion logs at the downstream end.
- Perimeter control will be established to prevent the potential for pollutants leaving the construction site boundaries. Perimeter control may consist of vegetation buffers, berms, silt fence, erosion logs, existing landforms, or other BMPs as approved.
- Concentrated discharge points will be protected with erosion control structures and erosion logs at the outlet end.

Radiation Monitoring

- All communications uses shall meet American National Standards Institute, Federal Communications Commission, and Forest Service regulations, policy, guidelines, and standards concerning radiation limitations. Monitoring radiation levels at the site is the responsibility of all site users and shall occur at intervals to comply with regulations and guidelines. A copy of the monitoring report shall be provided to the Forest Service within 30 days of its completion.
- Onsite radio frequency radiation (RFR) measurements shall be taken using appropriate equipment that can adequately measure levels both on the tower and on the ground before mitigation measures related to RFR are implemented. Security fences with RFR notice signs are required around areas that exceed public use levels. All fencing location and design shall be pre-approved by the Forest Service in the Communication Site Plan. Any identified RFR problems that are, or could be, a human health hazard shall be corrected within 24 hours after measurement tests have been completed, or the equipment involved shall be removed from the site by the site user. Any ground disturbance associated with correction of RFR problems or removal of equipment causing the problem must have prior written approval of the Forest Service authorized officer.

Also included is the Forest Service authorization to the Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association (PVREA) to construct, operate, and maintain an overhead distribution power line to serve the communication site. To meet the power needs of the communication facility's radio equipment, interior lights, receptacles, heating, and cooling systems, the Forest Service will authorize an extension of the commercial electrical power grid from Red Feather Lakes to PVREA to construct, operate, and maintain a 7.2 kV power line that will be installed overhead alongside County Road 162 (Deadman Road), NFSR 300, and the site access road. The power line will have a total length of approximately 11.6 miles and will be installed on 29-foot tall wooden monopoles for most of its length. The span between the overhead poles will range from 240 to 280 feet, and approximately 235 poles will be installed along the proposed alignment for the power line. See **Figure 3.**

Figure 3



Rationale for Decision

My rationale for selecting the Killpecker Site is based on this site having reduced impacts on most resources, including resources identified as key issues during the scoping process. As shown in Figure 1 and discussed further in Section 5, two action alternatives were evaluated in detail in the FEIS, including the Proposed Action (Middle Bald Mountain Site) and Preferred Action (Killpecker Site). Differences between the two action alternatives with respect to effects on identified key issues are summarized below:

Recreation. The Killpecker Site will have a reduced level of impacts on recreation and the recreation experience. This site avoids the significant impacts that the Middle Bald Mountain site would have made

to the recreational setting on Middle Bald Mountain, including the summit vicinity and the Killpecker Trail. Although the top of the tower at the Killpecker Site will be visible from the Middle Bald Mountain summit area and portions of the Killpecker Trail, visibility and impacts to the setting will be minor compared constructing the facility at the Middle Bald Mountain Site. Both alternatives would be consistent with established ROS classes.

Visual Resources. The Killpecker Site will have reduced impacts on visual resources than the Middle Bald Mountain Site would have. The primary difference between the alternatives is the lower visibility of the tower and no visibility of the facilities from the Killpecker Trail and the open meadow areas and summit of Middle Bald Mountain. The Middle Bald Mountain Site would have resulted in a significant adverse impact to trail users on the Killpecker Trail, while the Killpecker Site will not.

Vegetation. The Killpecker Site will result in reduced impact to vegetation resources. Development at the Killpecker Site will cause less overall disturbance and will impact fewer unique trees and fewer old-growth retention areas, as identified in the Forest Plan, than the Middle Bald Mountain Site due to the location of its access road. Development at the Killpecker Site will not impact the meadow or sensitive subalpine vegetation that would have been negatively impacted by development of the Middle Bald Mountain site.

Migratory Birds. The Killpecker Site, which is located in a forested setting with only a small portion of the tower rising above tree height, will have lesser potential impacts on migratory birds than development at the Middle Bald Mountain Site. The Middle Bald Mountain Site would have been fully exposed and would have presented a somewhat higher level of collision risk for migratory birds.

Soils. The Killpecker Site will have less overall soil disturbance at this site and for this access road. Development of the Killpecker Site will also have less impact on compaction-prone, limited reclamation potential, and shallow bedrock soils, because it will not cross the high-elevation meadow on Middle Bald Mountain to reach the tower site. Development of the Middle Bald Mountain Site would have required trenching for the powerline and construction and maintenance traffic across that high-elevation meadow with the sensitive soils.

Cultural Resources. The Killpecker Site will have a reduced level of impact on cultural sites than would the Middle Bald Mountain Site. Both alternatives included construction of a power distribution line along Deadman Road in proximity of two recorded sites that are officially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. However, no disturbance to these sites is anticipated during power line construction. Development of the Killpecker Site will avoid potential impacts to a site located on Middle Bald Mountain. Although no direct disturbance to this site would have resulted from development of the Middle Bald Mountain Site, increased foot traffic associated with construction and operation activities would have increased the risk of disturbance to this site.

For all of these reasons, my decision is to authorize Larimer County to construct, operate, and maintain a government entities only communication site (Federal, state county and local entities) at the Killpecker Site and to amend the Forest Plan accordingly. In addition, my decision is to authorize PVREA to construct, operate, and maintain an overhead distribution power line to serve this communication site.

3. Public Involvement

Public involvement during the EIS scoping period included publication of the Notice of Intent; public outreach through a project website; hard copy or email distribution of a scoping letter to the project mailing list; distribution of a press release; and public open house scoping meetings. Each of these is described below. The complete scoping summary report is available for download from the project website located at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/arp/middlebald.

3.1 Notice of Intent

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on September 14, 2012. The Notice of Intent invited public participation in the EIS scoping process and solicited public comments on the scope of the EIS during a 45-day scoping period that commenced September 14, 2012, and ended October 29, 2012.

3.2 Project Website

The Forest Service maintains a project website at:
http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/arp/middlebald

Larimer County maintains a project website at:
http://larimer.org/baldmountain/.

Various public announcements, project updates, project documents, background and contact information are posted as appropriate to these two project websites. The websites are updated as new information becomes available.

3.3 Scoping Letter

A scoping letter describing the proposed action, how to comment, and dates and locations for public meetings was distributed to the project mailing list by mail or email between September 14-15, 2012. The scoping letter included an informal site prospectus and call for interest from potential site users.

3.4 Press Release

A press release announcing the dates and locations of public scoping meetings was distributed to media outlets on September 24, 2012, and posted to the project website. The press release and public meeting reminders were also tweeted from the Canyon Lakes Ranger District's Twitter account.

3.5 Public Scoping Meetings

The Forest Service held public scoping meetings for the Middle Bald Mountain Area Communication Site on October 9, 2012, from 2 - 7 p.m. at the Forest Supervisor's Office, Continental Divide Conference Room (2150 Centre Ave., Bldg. E, Fort Collins, CO) and on October 10, 2012, from 2 - 7 p.m. at the Livermore Community Hall (1956 Red Feather Lakes Road, Livermore, CO). The dates, times, and locations of public scoping meetings were announced on the project website, through a press release, and through direct mailing or emailing of the scoping letter.

3.6 Scoping Comments

Seventy-nine comment letters were received during scoping for the 2006 proposal to construct a communication site at Middle Bald Mountain. The Forest Service received 54 comment forms, letters, and emails during the 45-day public scoping period for the EIS in the fall of 2012. Although the County's proposal was modified somewhat between 2006 and 2012, similar issues were raised during the two scoping periods. Public comments received during the two scoping periods are summarized in the scoping summary report available for download from the project website: http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/arp/middlebald.

3.7 Comments on Draft EIS

The DEIS was released in June 2014 and generated 10 comments. Comments received ranged from support of the project, particularly the Killpecker Site Alternative, to concerns that some types of impacts hadn't been adequately analyzed, specifically potential effects on migratory birds and other wildlife. One comment asserted that better and less damaging technology existed to improve radio communications in the area. Comments received and responses to those comments are presented in Appendix D of the Final EIS.

4. Issue Identification

Both public and internal scoping comments (generated by the Forest Service interdisciplinary review team) were considered during issue identification. Issues determined to be within the scope of the EIS and warranting detailed analysis are summarized in Section 4.1 below.

4.1 Issues Identified for Analysis

Issues warranting detailed analysis in the EIS include:

- Impacts to the aesthetics and visual aspects of the area (including scenic integrity at the alternative tower sites and in the viewshed, sense of place, solitude, wildness, etc.) from the location of communication site facilities and the installation of an overhead power line along established and proposed roads from the Red Feather Lakes area to the alternative communication sites.
- Impacts to motorized and non-motorized recreational experiences in the surrounding area (including to motorcycling, four-wheel and ATV driving, hiking, horseback riding mountain biking, etc.) from the two alternative communication sites, and from the proposed power line.
- Impacts to wetlands, fens, seeps, and to subalpine and alpine soils and vegetation from construction and maintenance of the access road and communication facility on Middle Bald Mountain, including increased foot and motorized traffic, social trails, spread of noxious weeds, etc.
- Impacts to avian species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) from collisions with and/or electrocution by the proposed overhead power line and/or the proposed tower.
- Impacts to affected Federal or State Threatened or Endangered species (TES), Forest Service sensitive species (FSS), and management indicator species (MIS) from construction, operations, and maintenance of the proposed communication site and power line.
- Impacts to the integrity of cultural resources, including those eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, from construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed communication site.
- Impacts to soil and water quality including erosion, runoff, and stream sedimentation from construction and maintenance of the proposed power line and access road.

5. Summary of Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

Larimer County came to the Forest Service with a proposal for a communication site on Middle Bald Mountain to meet their need for improved safety and communication. Using its special use permitting review process the Forest Service accepted the County's proposal as an application to take into the NEPA analysis.

5.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Service would not authorize Larimer County to construct and operate a communication site for government entity use in the vicinity of Middle Bald Mountain. Larimer County would continue to use the Deadman communication site, and the communication improvement objectives of the County and other government users would not be achieved. Inadequate VHF and no 800 MHz radio communication coverage would continue for emergency service providers and other public safety agencies in north central Larimer County and the Poudre Canyon.

5.2 Action Alternatives

A comprehensive review of potential alternatives was conducted by the Forest Service. The range of reasonable alternatives was developed through the scoping processes, which highlighted specific issues. In response to these issues, a range of alternatives was considered, using each of the project's key components as follows: (**Figure 4** shows the location of the action alternatives:

- Site Location. Alternate sites in the vicinity of Middle Bald Mountain as well as an alternative with multiple sites in the Poudre Canyon were considered.
- Tower Location and Design. This included consideration of another tower location on the summit of Middle Bald Mountain, a tower located at the Killpecker site, and construction of the tower on top of the building, to combine the footprint of the tower and the building and reduce the overall footprint of the project.
- Building Location and Design. This included consideration of other building locations in and around the summit of Middle Bald Mountain and at the Killpecker site and various design treatments of the building.
- Site Access. Several access road alignments between NFSR 517. NFSR 300, and the proposed communication facilities at Middle Bald Mountain and the Killpecker site were considered, as well as alternative means of access, such as construction by helicopter and foot-only access for operation and maintenance.
- Power Source. In addition to reliance on commercial power sources, the use of renewable energy at the Middle Bald Mountain summit and Killpecker sites were evaluated.
- Power Line Route. Alternate routes and system designs were considered.
- Alternate Communication Systems. The possibility of utilizing a satellite-based system was evaluated.
- Site Designations. The possibility of designating the site for other types of uses, including use by non-governmental and commercial users, was considered.

Proposed Action: Government Entities Only (Federal, State, County, and Municipal entities) Communication Site at Middle Bald Mountain Summit

Under the Proposed Action identified in FEIS the Forest Service would issue an authorization to Larimer County for the construction and operation of a radio communications facility at the summit of Middle Bald Mountain for government entities only (Federal, state, county, municipal entities). The proposed Middle Bald Mountain communication site would be located at an elevation of approximately 10,980 feet. The tower and building would house equipment for use by Larimer County, the State of Colorado, the Fort

Collins Water Department, volunteer fire departments, search and rescue organizations, and the Forest Service.
Larimer County would be the lease holder and site manager. Larimer County, the State of Colorado, and the City of Fort Collins would remove their equipment from the Deadman site if the Middle Bald Mountain site were authorized. The Forest Service would co-locate at the Middle Bald site, as well. The Proposed Action would meet the purpose of and need for action by improving VHF and adding 800 MHz coverage and reliability in north central Larimer County and the Poudre Canyon for fire and medical first responders, law enforcement, and other local, State, and Federal emergency and public services users.

In addition, the Forest Service would authorize Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association (PVREA) to construct, operate, and maintain an overhead distribution power line to serve the communication site. The ROW width for the power line would be 20 feet (10 feet on each side of the center line). The new power line would connect from PVREA's existing infrastructure near Red Feather Lake, west alongside the Deadman Road (County Road 162) to its junction with the Killpecker Road, then south alongside the Killpecker Road (NFSR 300) to its junction with NFSR 517. The power line would go east along NFSR 517 to the point at which the proposed access road will leave NFSR 517. The overhead power line would continue alongside the access road to the point at the access road stops at the eastern edge of the trees bordering the meadow at the Middle Bald Mountain summit. The power line would then be buried by trenching it in across that meadow to the communication site building near the summit.

The proposed Middle Bald Mountain communication site is located in MA 5.11 (Emphasis on General Forest and Intermingled Rangeland). A decision to authorize a communication site the Middle Bald Mountain Site would amend the Forest Plan to designate the approximately 0.5 acres as MA 8.3 (Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites).

Environmentally Preferred and Forest Service Preferred Alternative: Government Entities Only (Federal, State, County and Municipal entities) Communication Site at the KillpeckerSite

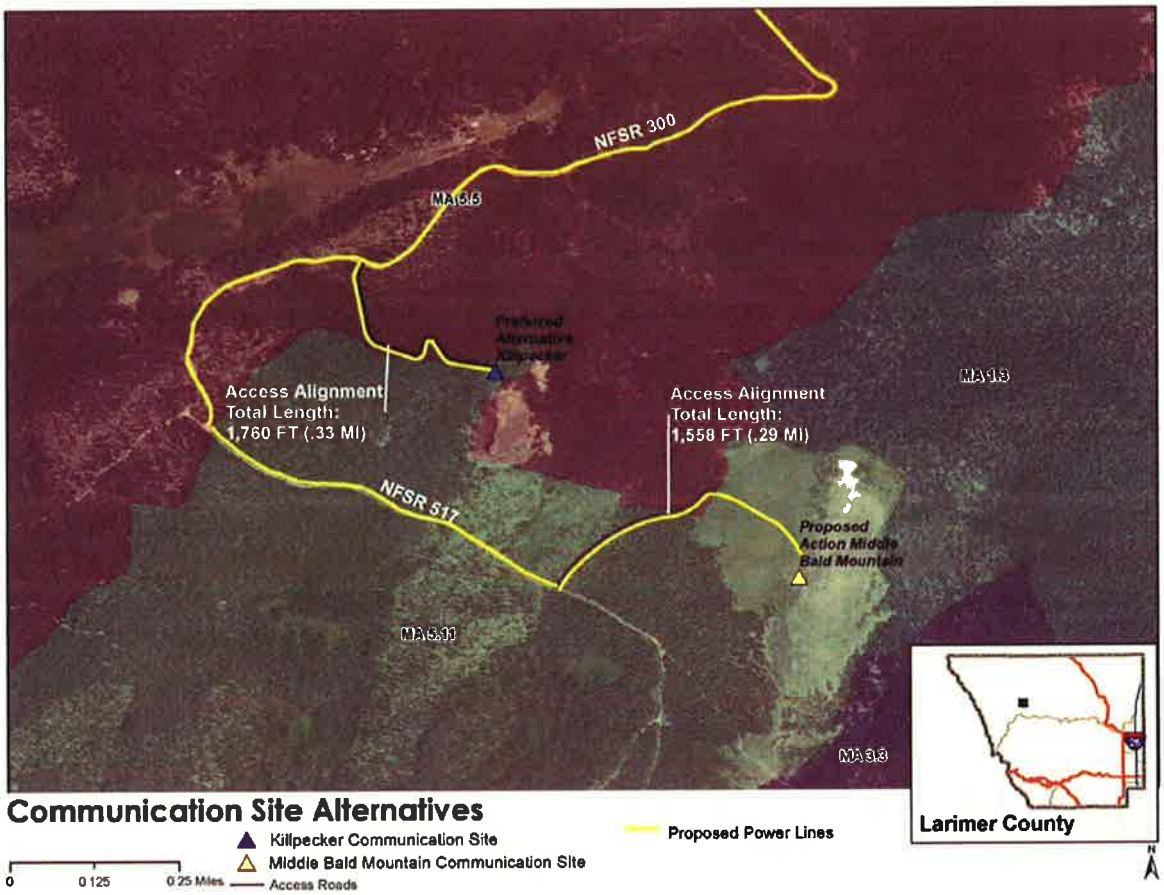
Public comments on this project expressed concerns about the extent of impacts to both physical resources and the importance of intangible qualities such as the sense of place, wildness, isolation, etc. Sensitive to those comments, throughout the alternatives development process the Forest Service and Larimer County maintained an active search to identify alternative site locations that would meet the project purpose and need and have fewer resource impacts than the Middle Bald Mountain site. After considerable searching, one such location, referenced herein as the Killpecker Site, was identified. The Killpecker Site is located at a similar elevation approximately 0.5 mile to the northwest of the Middle Bald Mountain Site. An on-the-ground evaluation conducted by Pericle Communications Company demonstrated that development of the site would result in radio communication improvements at least as good as the Middle Bald Mountain Site. This, combined with preliminary resource evaluations indicating that the Killpecker Site will have minimal or no impacts on cultural, recreation, visual, vegetative, and soils/watershed/hydrologic resource impacts, compared to the Middle Bald Mountain Site, resulted in the decision to carry the Killpecker Site forward as an action alternative.

Facilities at this site will be the same as described for the Proposed Action at the Middle Bald Mountain Site. The Killpecker Site meets the purpose of and need for action by improving VHF and adding 800 MHz coverage and reliability in north central Larimer County and the Poudre Canyon for fire and medical first-responders, law enforcement, and other local, State, and Federal emergency and public services users. The detailed analysis of resource impacts indicated lesser impacts to all resources at the Killpecker site than at a Middle Bald Mountain site. For these reasons, the Killpecker site alternative was identified as the Forest Service's preferred alternative and the Environmentally Preferred Alternative in the Draft and Final EIS.

A connected action tied to an authorization of this communication site is Forest Service authorization to PVREA for the construction, operation, and maintenance of an overhead distribution power line to serve the communication site, as was described for the Preferred Alternative.

Under this alternative action the Forest Service will issue an authorization to Larimer County for the construction and operation of a government entities only (Federal, State, County and Municipal entities) communication site at the Killpecker Site. The Killpecker communication site is located in MA 5.11 (Emphasis on General Forest and Intermingled Rangeland) **(Figure 4)**. A decision to authorize a communication site at the Killpecker Site will also require an amendment to the Forest Plan in order to designate approximately 0.5 acres within the designated communication site boundary as MA 8.3 (Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites).

Figure 4



6. Findings required by other laws

This decision is consistent with all laws, regulations and agency policy relevant to this project and as described in the Final EIS Chapter 1, Section 1.6.4. The Decision to authorize a designated communication site requires an amendment to the Forest Plan. A National Forest Management Act significance analysis can be found in the FEIS in Chapter 1, Section 1.6.5.

7. Implementation Date

Implementation of this project will not occur for a minimum of 50 days (45 day objection process and 5 day stay if no objection is received) following publication of the legal notice of this decision in the *Coloradoan*, Fort Collins, Colorado. If an objection is filed, the Objections Processing Officer has up to 45 days (which may be extended an additional 30 days if needed) to resolve the objection and provide a written response to the objection to the Responsible Official. The Responsible Official can then finalize the Decision, which can be implemented immediately.

8. Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Carol Kruse, Special Projects Coordinator, Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland, 2150 Centre Ave, Building E, Fort Collins, CO 80526, 970-295-6663, or ckruse@fs.fed.us.

Responsible Official

GLENN P. CASAMASSA
Forest Supervisor
Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests
Pawnee National Grassland

12-17-14
DATE